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ABSTRACT

This fact sheet presents an overview of the situation facing older adults with respect to employment and education. Demographic statistics presented on persons over 65 include male-female ratio, proportion living in institutions, years of schooling, percentage with incomes below poverty level, and labor force participation. Implications of these facts are drawn related to work, education, and volunteerism for older adults. Examples of employment, education, and volunteer programs established at both the national and local levels are described. Suggestions for helping older adults take advantage of opportunities are accompanied by a list of five national organizations which can provide assistance. A bibliography of two references and three additional resources, some of which are available from the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) system, is included. (DC)

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Career Assistance for Older Adults.

OVERVIEW: ERIC Fact Sheet No. 8.

by

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ERIC OVERVIEW

FACT SHEET No. : 8

Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

SOME FACTS

The proportion of older people within the total population of the United States has been growing steadily. Today, the ratio of younger to older adults is six to one; by 2030 it will be three to one.

Although within their population group older people are individually more different than alike, they collectively represent this profile.

- Of the approximately 23 million people age sixty-five and over in the United States, nearly 60 percent are women.
- Most older men (79 percent) are married, while most older women (53 percent) are widowed.
- Only a very small proportion (5 percent) of older people live in institutions (nursing homes, state hospitals, and so forth). The majority of older people are mobile and in good health.
- Older people had completed an average of 9.5 years of school in 1977. (This level will rise sharply as the younger, more educated generations become older.)
- The income of about 15 percent of the older population is below the poverty level.
- Labor force participation is small for older people. About 13 percent of them are employed and most of these are males. (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979)

Despite the fact that "most of the older population of the United States have both the desire and potential to be productive, contributing members of society" (Sheppard 1979), early retirement trends and "ageism" (the belief that older adults are of no practical value) deny older citizens the opportunity of meaningful participation.

IMPLICATIONS

Given such a continuously building population and the current attitudes concerning it, we are faced with the following serious considerations:

- There are increasingly fewer producing and earning people and more retired people needing support in our society.
- A resource (the older population) that is rich and potentially productive to society is being unwisely wasted.
- The quality of the lives of older adults is minimized because needs such as the following are being neglected:

Work – Some older adults wish to work either because they need the extra income or because they need to feel productive in our work-oriented culture. Still others may wish to work for the social stimulation, to avoid the emptiness of retirement, or to pursue a second career.

Education – Those older adults interested in learning, but lacking self-directed learning techniques, need access to structured educational experiences for any or all of the following reasons: to prepare for a job, to learn how to cope in a changing society, to expand intellectual and spiritual horizons, and to gain information needed to influence others.

Volunteerism – Some older people for whom extra income is not a need simply want to give of their time and ability to help others, deriving the same type of satisfaction working or education gives others.

POSSIBILITIES

The following programs are examples of established assistance to help older people as they pursue employment, education, or volunteer activities.

EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

Federal Legislation

The Age Discrimination and Employment Act of 1968 (and amended 1978) prohibits discrimination in hiring against citizens between forty and sixty-five and raises mandatory retirement age from sixty-five to seventy years old. Further, CETA titles II and III provide for the training of older adults in human resource programs and seek to eliminate artificial barriers to employment through program and policy guidelines.

National Programs

Green Thumb, sponsored by the National Farmers Union, provides on-the-job training (OJT) in conservation and beautification in rural areas for persons over forty-five. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and the National Council on Aging (NCOA), both private advocacy organizations, also have environmental and community service employment programs.

Local Programs

Project HIRE, in Bedford, Massachusetts, helps people

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fifty-five and older locate jobs at no cost to applicant or employer. Project SERVE (Stimulate, Educate, Reassess, Volunteer, and Employ), of the Oakland Community College in Michigan, provides counseling and placement for older adults.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

National Efforts

Free tuition is granted to people over sixty-five by many colleges and public universities throughout the country. Elderhostel Program, a network of over 2,300 colleges and universities in thirty-eight states, offers low-cost, one-week summer residential academic programs for older adults.

Local Efforts

In general, community agencies (YMCAs, museums, libraries, and so forth) offer courses for older people. Project HAND (Helping Aged Needing Direction), in New York City, involves teenagers teaching exercises, crafts, and cooking to older adults. Florida Junior College, in Jacksonville, offers courses on money management, health maintenance, and hobbies for older people.

VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

National Programs

Federal ACTION programs include—

the Foster Grandparent Program, in which older, low-income adults work on a one-to-one basis with handicapped children;

the Senior Companion Program, wherein older adults visit and provide companionship to the elderly with special problems;

the Retired Senior Volunteer Program, which includes a wide range of volunteer activities;

the Service Corps of Retired Executives, which provides business expertise for persons owning or operating a small business;

the Senior Intern Program, in which older people who are local advocates for the aged can serve several weeks in Washington, D.C., with their senators and representatives.

Local Programs

In southwest Virginia older people with special knowledge in creative and performing arts can volunteer to assist 4-H members with interests in these areas. In Portland, Oregon, older people can volunteer for a citywide program that places them in such settings as the county welfare department, human service agencies, and the state employment services.

SUGGESTIONS

Personal efforts in assisting older adults to find work, education, or volunteer opportunities may include the following:

- Helping older persons find and gain entrance into programs such as those previously mentioned
- Using older adults (either in a volunteer or paid-employment capacity) within one's own organization
- Advertising specifically for positions, creating flexible work schedules, and personally encouraging older adults to overcome self-restricting limitations (fear, lack of confidence, poor self-esteem, and so forth)
- Contacting such organizations as the local or regional area agencies on aging, the House Subcommittee on Aging, or any of the following:

ACTION
Senior Companion Program/Foster Grandparents
806 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20525

Administration on Aging
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
330 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

American Association of Retired Persons
1909 K Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036

Gerontological Society
One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 520
Washington, DC 20036

National Council on Aging
1828 L Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036

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Additional and related materials in ERIC on this subject may be found by using the index terms applied to the documents listed above. See appropriate RIE volume.

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